

CHARCOAL

Prepared exclusively for students of
ART INSTRUCTION SCHOOLS

CONTRIBUTORS

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For several reasons, professional and student artists alike find charcoal a very satisfying medium to work in. Charcoal is as easy to apply and to control as the pencil and yet, as you will learn in this lesson, a single stick of charcoal can give you an extremely large selection of light and dark values. Charcoal also offers an exciting versatility which makes it a valuable medium for everything from fast sketching to carefully detailed studies.

Another of charcoal's advantages is that mistakes can be very easily corrected. An unwanted line or an unfortunate smear can be quickly erased with a sweep of your kneaded eraser, a wipe of your chamois, or even with a clean rag.

But perhaps the most enjoyable aspect of charcoal, from the artist's point of view, is that it lends itself so perfectly to a free and spontaneous approach to nearly any subject. The charcoal stick, gripped loosely with the hand held off the paper, allows a maximum amount of wrist and arm movement, a bolder and more sweeping stroke, and, in general, greater drawing flexibility.

From the prehistoric man who scratched pictures of animals on the wall of his cave with a charred stick to today's commercial artist carefully finishing a charcoal and wash fashion advertisement, charcoal has been, and continues to be, one of the most important and impressive of the art mediums.



Study by student Anne Hamilton, winner of first prize in Annual Competition's Charcoal Section.

Charcoal

Charcoal Drawing

For years, fine artists have used charcoal for figure and cast studies, and today charcoal is also one of the commercial artist's favorite tools. Because it is inexpensive, soft and easy to correct, charcoal is as popular today as it was a hundred years ago. With just one stick of charcoal an artist is able to create contrast, depth and texture. And these textures are not only effective when used alone but also decorative and interesting when they are combined with opaque wash, transparent wash, pastels and tempera paint. This versatility makes charcoal useful for preliminary sketches, finished advertisements and illustrations.

Charcoal can be compared to a soft graphite pencil. Your use of charcoal will be very similar to the way you use your pencils. For instance, to create light tones with charcoal or pencil you use very little pressure, and to develop darker areas you will need to apply more pressure. But charcoal is not made of graphite — instead it is a type of impure carbon ("burnt wood"). It is quite a bit softer and more brittle than any graphite you have worked with. The softness of charcoal gives it a better value range than a pencil has, but the lack of hardness also makes it difficult to maintain a point. You will be able to hold a point for fine line drawing if you use the harder grades of charcoal sticks or a charcoal pencil, but for the most part, charcoal is more useful for large tonal effects or shading. And the extreme softness of this material, in addition to offering an almost perfect range of value, also makes charcoal drawings easy to correct.

While charcoal is especially good for fast sketches and spontaneous drawings, it is also effective for more finished and more highly developed drawings. Notice the three examples of charcoal drawing in this introduction. The sketch of the girl is a fine example of a fast and loose charcoal technique. That bold, casual approach is very popular in commercial and fine art for both preliminary drawings and finished art. For the drawing of the deer, instead of using a charcoal stick, the artist used a charcoal pencil in order to get the fine line effect. The other drawing (still life) illustrates the beauty and serenity of a well planned and carefully blended charcoal drawing. Study the variety of tones and gray areas in the still life. The drawings are completely different in their approaches, but are effective for their own particular characteristics.

Once you begin to explore charcoal you too will realize that it has the spontaneity of ink and brush, the value range of opaque wash and the control of pencil. For these reasons, you, like so many other artists, will appreciate the medium and want to use it for finished drawings as well as for fast sketches.



Charcoal sketch by Art Instruction Schools' student, Matthew Moreno.



Drawing by Les Kouba, courtesy of Carlson-Kemart.



Charcoal Drawing Tools

There are basically two types of charcoal: vine (natural) and chemical (artificial). Both types are made of carbon, and both come in soft, medium and hard grades. The natural charcoal comes in "sticks" that resemble burnt wood, and the chemical charcoal can be obtained in pencil form and "compressed" sticks.

Whether you use natural or chemical charcoal, you will probably want to try using the paper stump. The stump is a stick of tightly wound gray paper with a point on one or both ends. There is also a tortillon stick made of more loosely rolled paper. By rubbing charcoal lines and areas with either tortillon or stump, you will be able to blend and to create smooth tone areas.

A leather chamois (pronounced shamee) and a soft cloth can also be used for rubbing and blending. However, they are more useful for lightening areas of preliminary drawings that are to be corrected.

When you develop your drawings, you can render even, dark tones by using the side of a charcoal stick. However, for fine lines you will need a point. In order to form a point on charcoal sticks you should rotate the stick and use all sides of it as you rub it against scratch paper or a sandpaper block. Remember, there are several layers of sandpaper on each block, so you can peel a dirty layer off to get a fresh one.

No matter how carefully you keep a point on your charcoal,

there are times when a line or an area will not "look right". If you can't correct the error with a chamois or a cloth, you can use your kneaded eraser. This eraser can be kept clean by "kneading" the charcoal into the rubber. Charcoal drawings can be corrected without much work, but they also smear easily.

And because charcoal smears, it is necessary to coat your final drawings with "varnish" called fixative or fixatif. One common method is with a jar of fixatif and a fixatif blower. To use the blower, place the long tube into the jar of fixatif and make sure the shorter tube is at a right angle to it. Stand about 18 inches from your drawing and blow through the tube. This will spray the varnish evenly onto your drawing. Be sure to blow out any remaining spray before you put the blower away. Spray cans of fixatif are also popular and are available at art supply stores. When you work on gray paper you may want to add highlights with a white pencil or with chalk. To avoid smearing the charcoal, these accents should be added after the drawing has been sprayed. If you use white chalk, you will have to give the drawing a second coat of fixatif.

You can buy special textured charcoal paper, but you will be able to use almost any paper with this medium. Hard charcoal works best on textured paper, but you will also be able to get some interesting effects with it on smooth paper. Experiment with different papers. Don't ignore the possibility of using colored papers for better work and inexpensive newsprint for practice!

Techniques of Charcoal Drawing

Just by changing your technique you will be able to give new character to your work. There are times when you will want to use the direct method of rendering (without a paper stump) and other times when you will want to use the stump. Many artists enjoy working on gray paper because the paper serves as a half tone. But, whether you use one technique or a combination, you will want to use as much line and tone variety as possible. Variety and contrast are the keys to interesting art work.

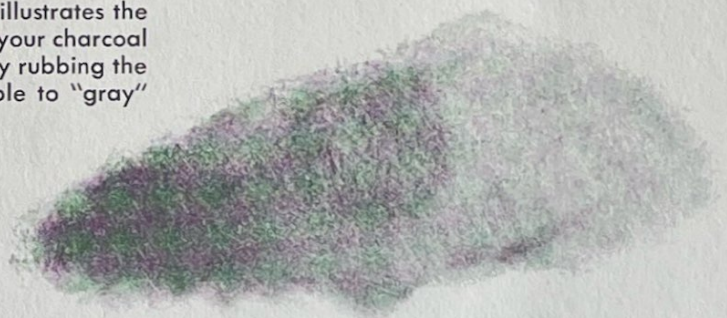
And to create interesting lines and contrast, you will have to practice applying varying amounts of pressure to your charcoal. As you press harder with your charcoal, lines become wider and darker. Practice the charcoal techniques you see on this page.

WHAT TO DO

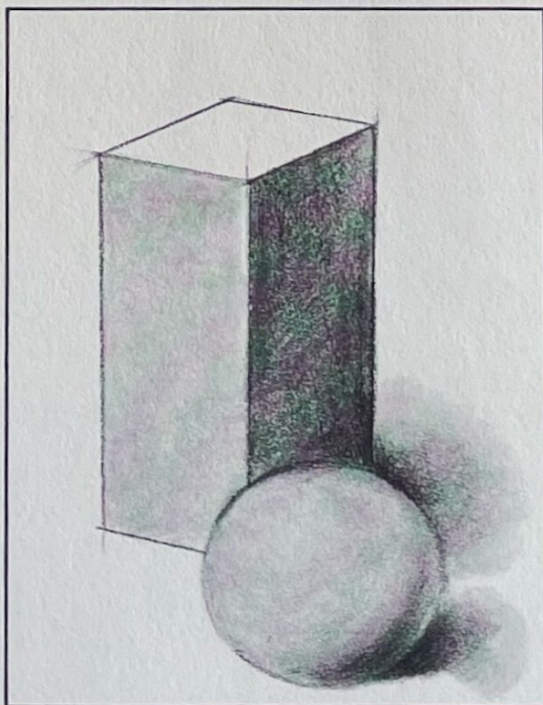
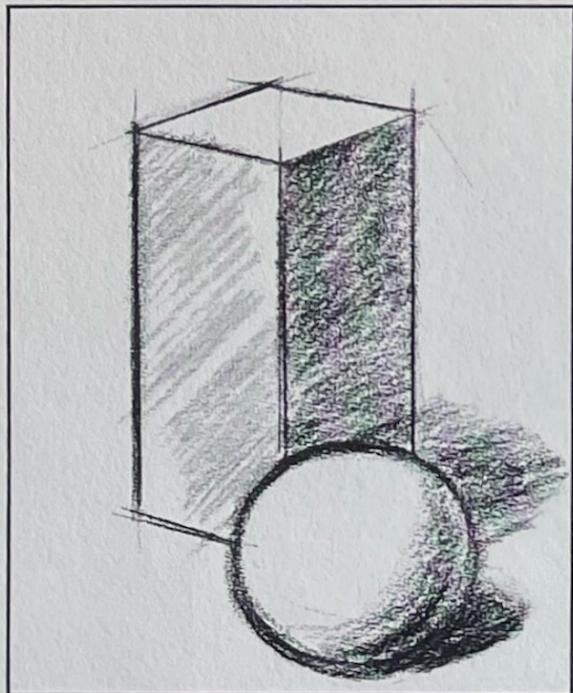
Take a piece of scratch paper and try the different techniques of rendering (varied line, built-up, and stump blending). Don't worry about using them in a picture yet. After you have become familiar with your charcoal and the results you can obtain with various pressures, try doing a value scale like the one on this page. Once you are able to get these tones, you should be ready to use your charcoal techniques in a simple sketch. Draw the "ball" and the "box" on a piece of scratch paper. Try one by using the direct method and another by employing the paper stump.



These three "swatches" illustrate three different ways to handle your charcoal. The first one demonstrates the interesting line variety you can create by using different pressures. The second "swatch" shows you the range of values you will be able to create by using a built-up line (one that starts light and gets darker by increased pressure). The third technique illustrates the way you will be able to blend and model your charcoal areas by using the paper stump. By gently rubbing the charcoal on your paper, you will be able to "gray" it out and blend it into white or black.

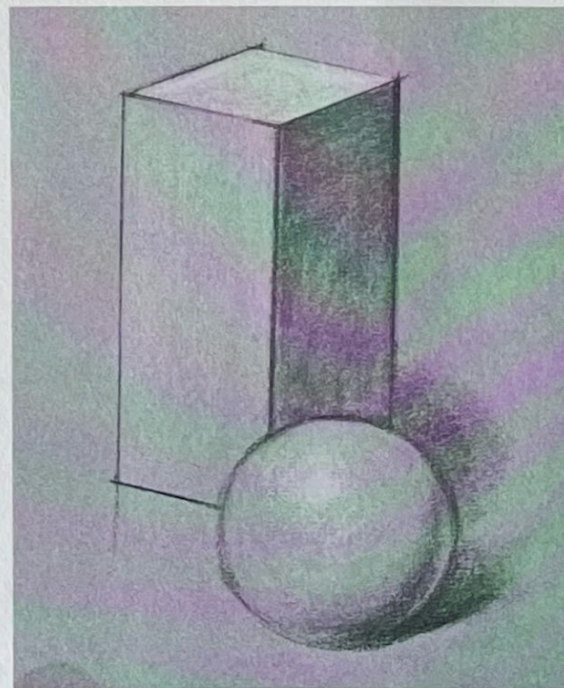


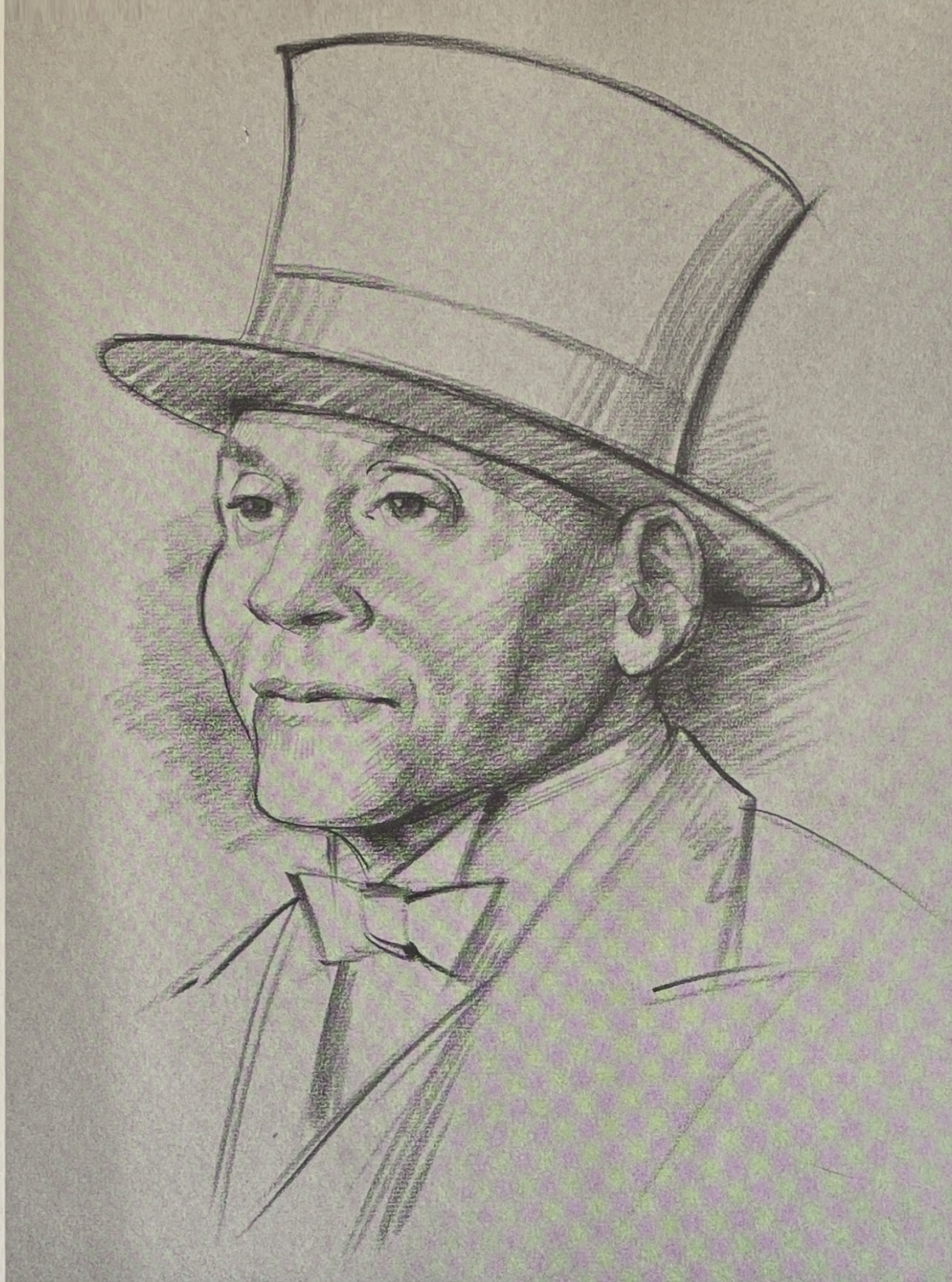
The artist rendered this picture with a direct method. In other words, he didn't rub his charcoal areas to make them soft and even in tone. First he used light lines to establish the position and shape of the objects, then he added light shadows by using the side of his charcoal. When the light shading was in place, the artist darkened the lines and shadows to create contrast and form. By not rubbing the strokes, the artist allowed the texture of the paper to show through, which gave the drawing extra sparkle and freedom.



This sketch was done with the aid of a paper stump. First the artist laid in the tones and lines of the objects (similar to the direct method). After he developed and darkened the gray areas and the lines he blended them with a paper stump. By rubbing the charcoal with a stump, the large flat areas became more even and lost some of the paper texture. The paper stump can help you create even tones in flat gray areas and gentle shading on curved objects like the ball.

You will be able to get some interesting effects if you use gray paper. Notice the middle tone of the objects are left the color of the paper. In order to create the illusion of form and structure, the artist used charcoal to indicate the shadows and white chalk to develop highlights. The artist has used a minimum of stump blending in this study. Drawings on colored paper are fun and exciting for a change of pace.





Portrait and Landscape by Richard Lack.

Shading Techniques

This portrait study is a fine example of direct method rendering. Although the drawing was done without a paper stump or a chamois, the head still has a solid, realistic appearance. Instead of blending by rubbing, the artist developed this drawing by his careful use of controlled strokes. The original outline located the position and shapes of the head, but the charcoal tones gave it form and solidity. While the artist indicated volume by using light and dark areas, the fine line details in the features of the face help give the drawing contrast and stability. This drawing has a full range of values. You can find tones that range from very light gray to rich black. The light gray paper forms an excellent base for the charcoal rendering.



This charcoal drawing was blended with a paper stump and highlighted with white chalk. The paper stump was effectively used to create the soft, billowy effect of the clouds and trees. The artist first shaded the areas with light charcoal tones and then rubbed and blended them to achieve feathery edges. Although the stump gave the clouds and trees an airy look, the artist's use of rubbing actually made the house appear more solid. By rubbing even tones of gray on the roof and the walls, the shadow areas became flatter and more realistic. This is because the artist stayed within the sharp outlines of the structure and only used the stump to create even, gray tones. White chalk was used to indicate the sun and to give contrast and highlights to the house and the road.

Charcoal Practice: Direct Method

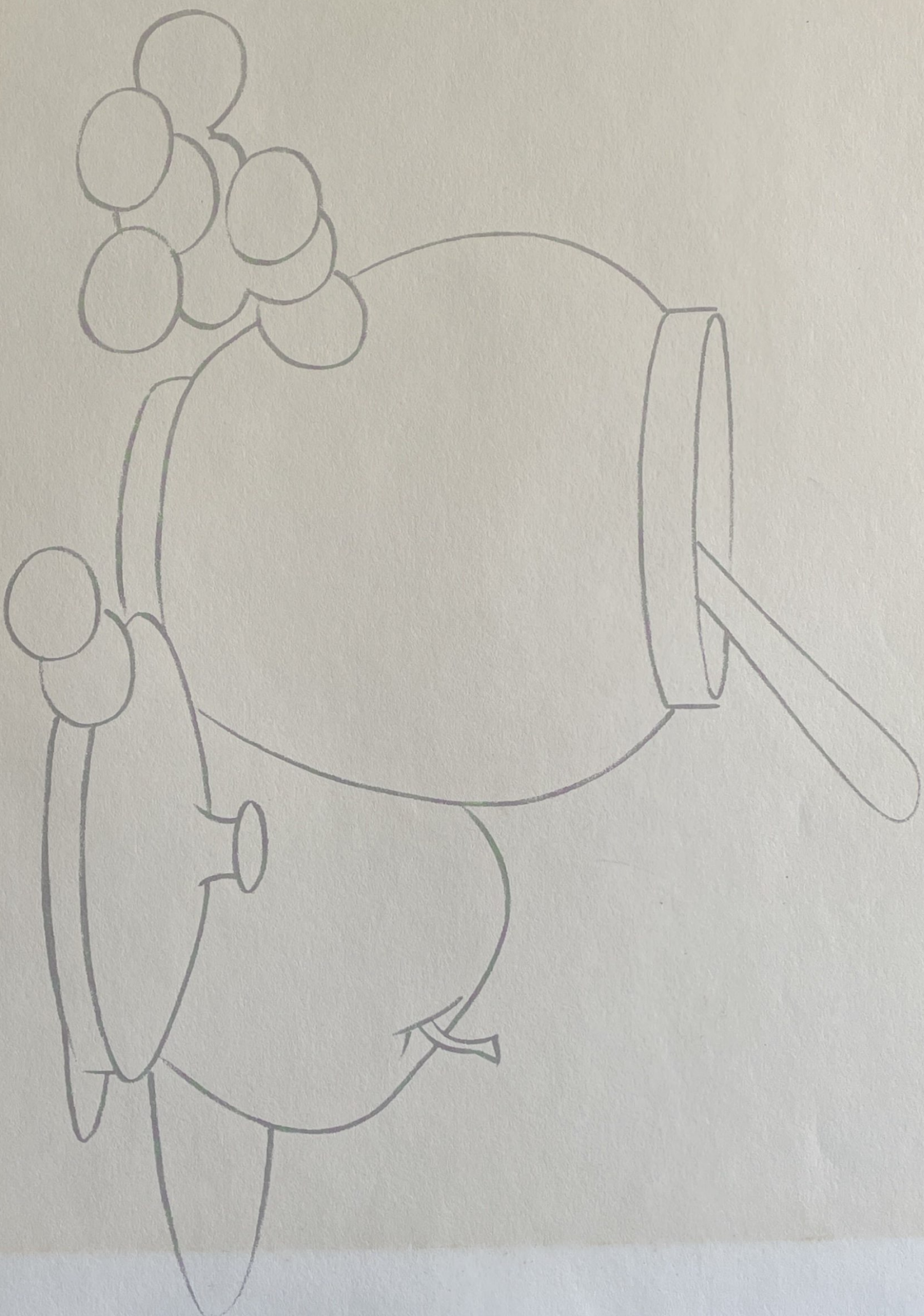
The drawings on this page illustrate two of the steps used in direct method (no rubbing) rendering. The artist first sketched a light outline similar to the one on the insert practice page. Then, he drew in some of the important gray tones. Notice that in this stage the gray tones were kept light so they could be changed easily. Once the light gray areas were established, he darkened his lines and shadows to give the drawing more form and stability.

In order to become familiar with the direct method, you should complete the drawing on the insert practice page just as the still life on this page was drawn. Remember, the first shading should be light enough so you can make alterations easily. To keep your tones light, use a minimum of pressure on the charcoal stick. In the next step you should add more contrast and variations. Make your drawing look as much like the completed still life as you can. After you have finished the drawing spray it with fixatif.



Direct Method Still Life by Richard Lack.

CHARCOAL PRACTICE



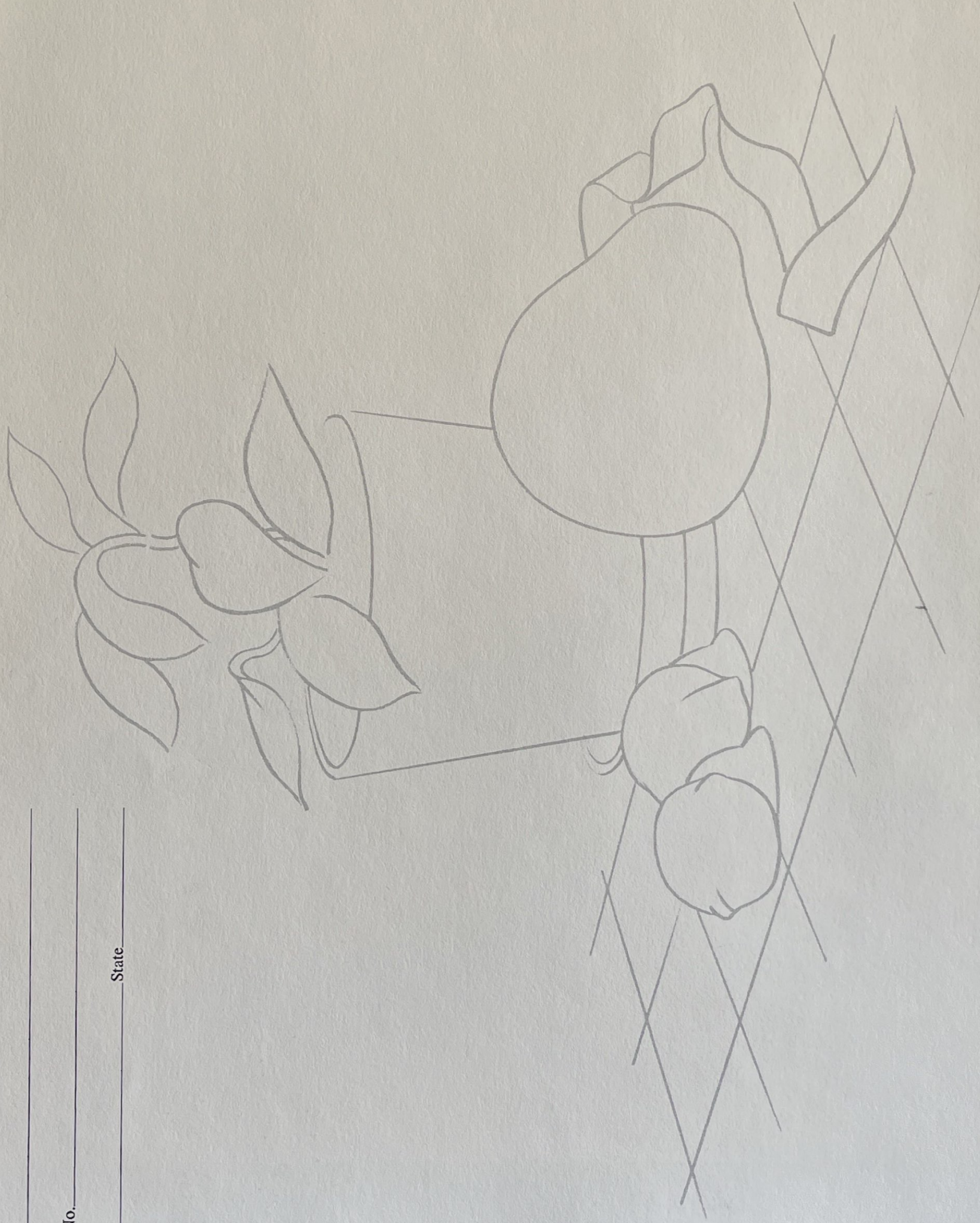
This practice sheet should be sent to the school. It will show us some of your practice work and will help determine your grade. Your instructor will study these drawings before he evaluates your lesson assignment work.

Student No. _____ Date _____

Name _____

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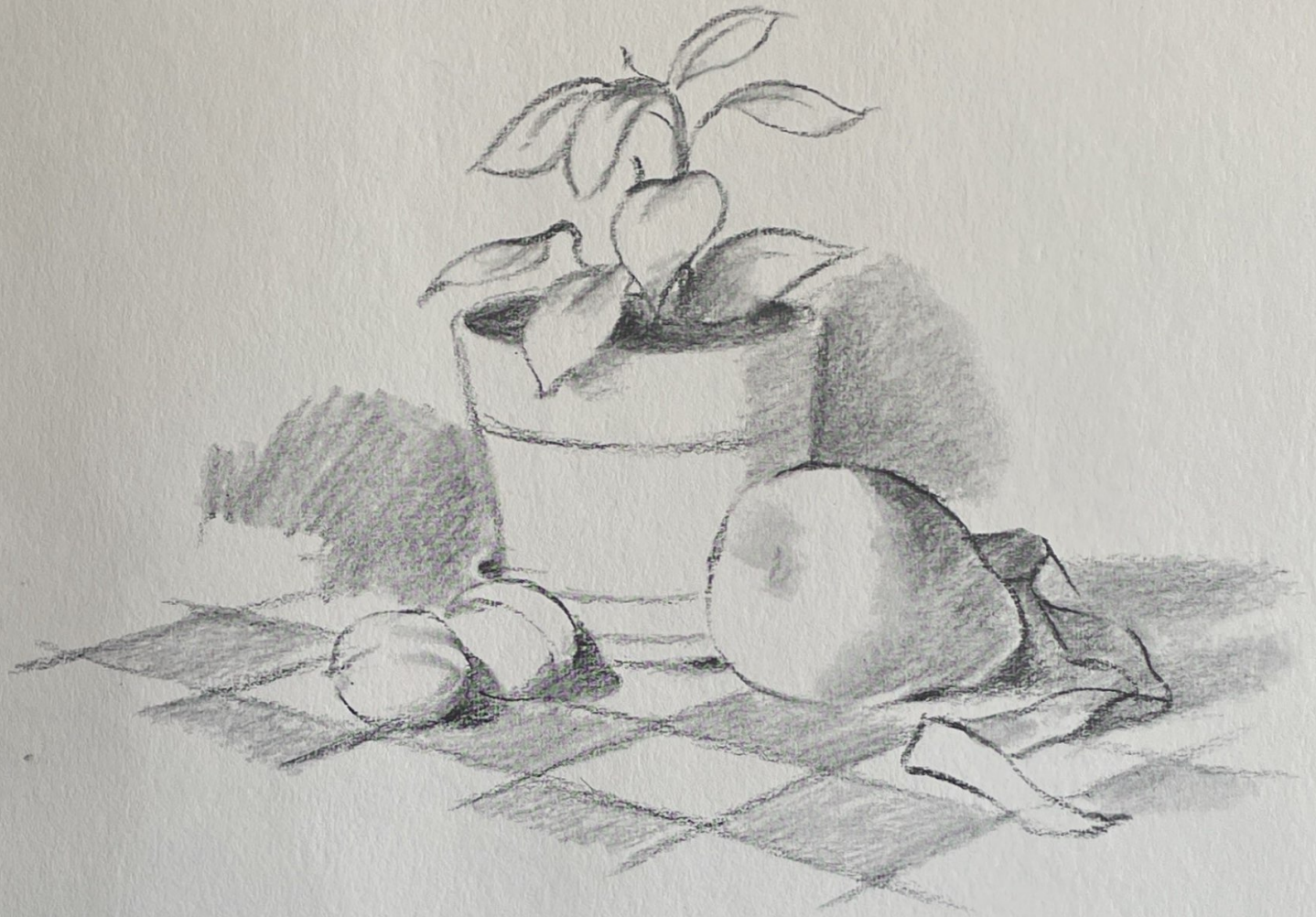


Charcoal Practice: Stump Method

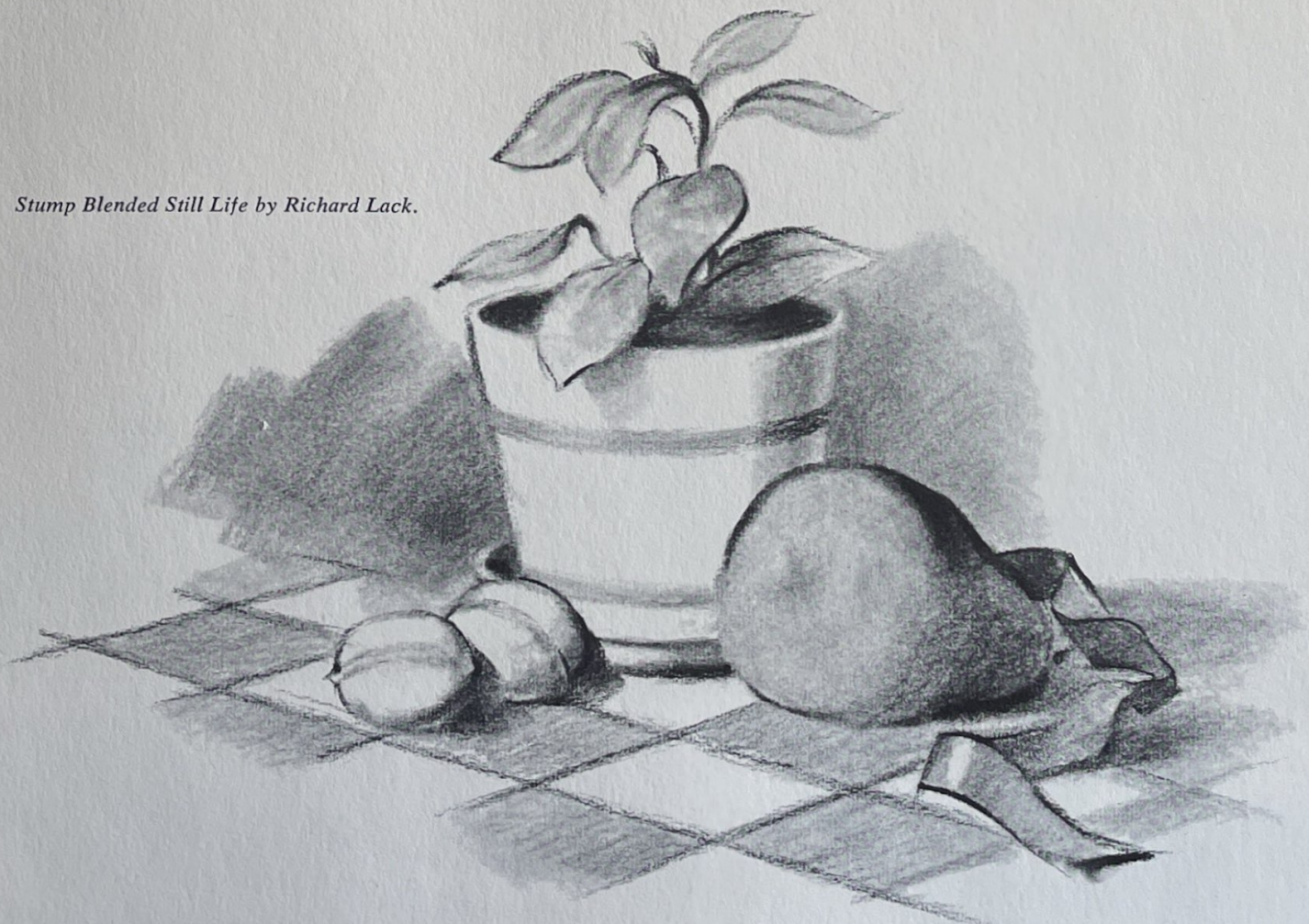
The still life on this page was done with a stick of charcoal and a paper stump. The artist began with a light outline sketch. Then he applied light gray tones of charcoal to his outline and blended these tones with a paper stump. Notice that his blending gives these areas a softer appearance. The artist completed his drawing by making his shadows and lines more intense. By continuing to use the paper stump, he created a soft and well blended effect.

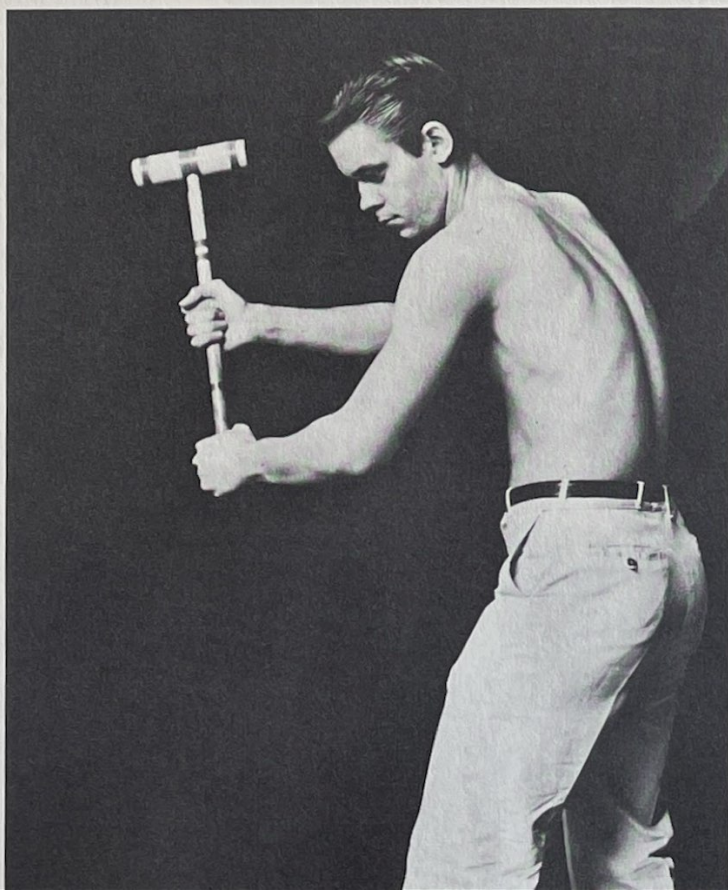
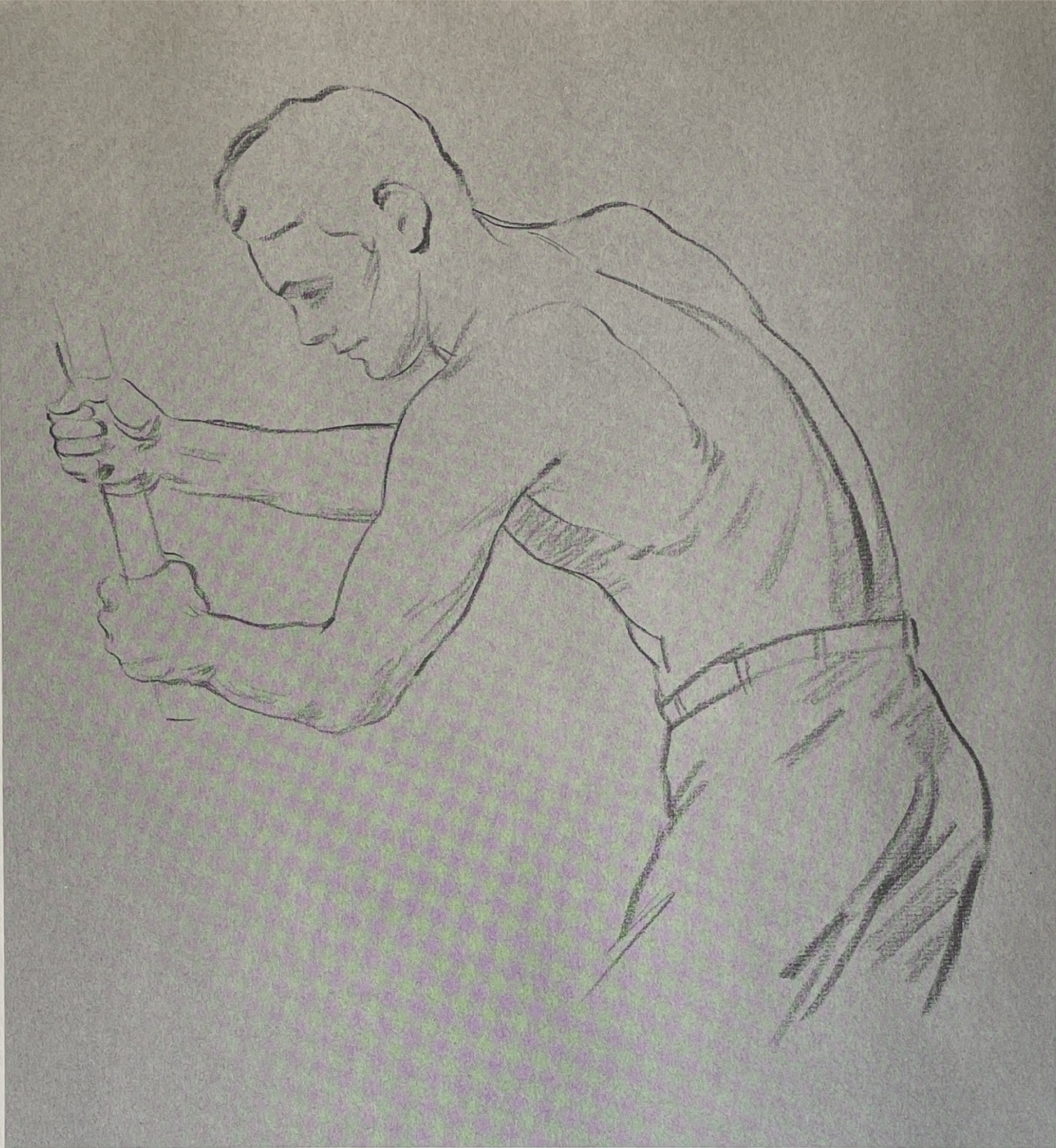
Study the drawing rubbed with a paper stump. Then, complete

the drawing on the practice insert sheet by using the same technique. Be sure to begin with light shading and gentle stump blending. Develop your first step to the point where you feel the shadows are correctly placed and the form is established. After you have done this, darken the shadows and finish the drawing. You won't have to use too much charcoal for your shading because you will be able to use the paper stump to blend some of the charcoal from one area into another. Remember to spray your drawing with fixatif.



Stump Blended Still Life by Richard Lack.





Drawing From Photographs

This charcoal study was developed from the photograph. In this first step the artist defined the figure and its relation to the background space. The sketch was purposely kept simple and free of excessive details. And by concentrating on the structure and position of the figure, the artist was able to judge his lines for variety and movement. Instead of developing the shading at this point, the artist only indicated where the shadow areas were to go.

When you pick a photograph to work from, you should be sure it shows the form of the subject. The lighting is especially good in this picture. Notice how the strong light source accents the shadow and highlight areas. If you spot a good photo with contrast, clip it out of the magazine or newspaper and save it in your file. Once your file begins to grow, you will have a wealth of models and information at your fingertips.

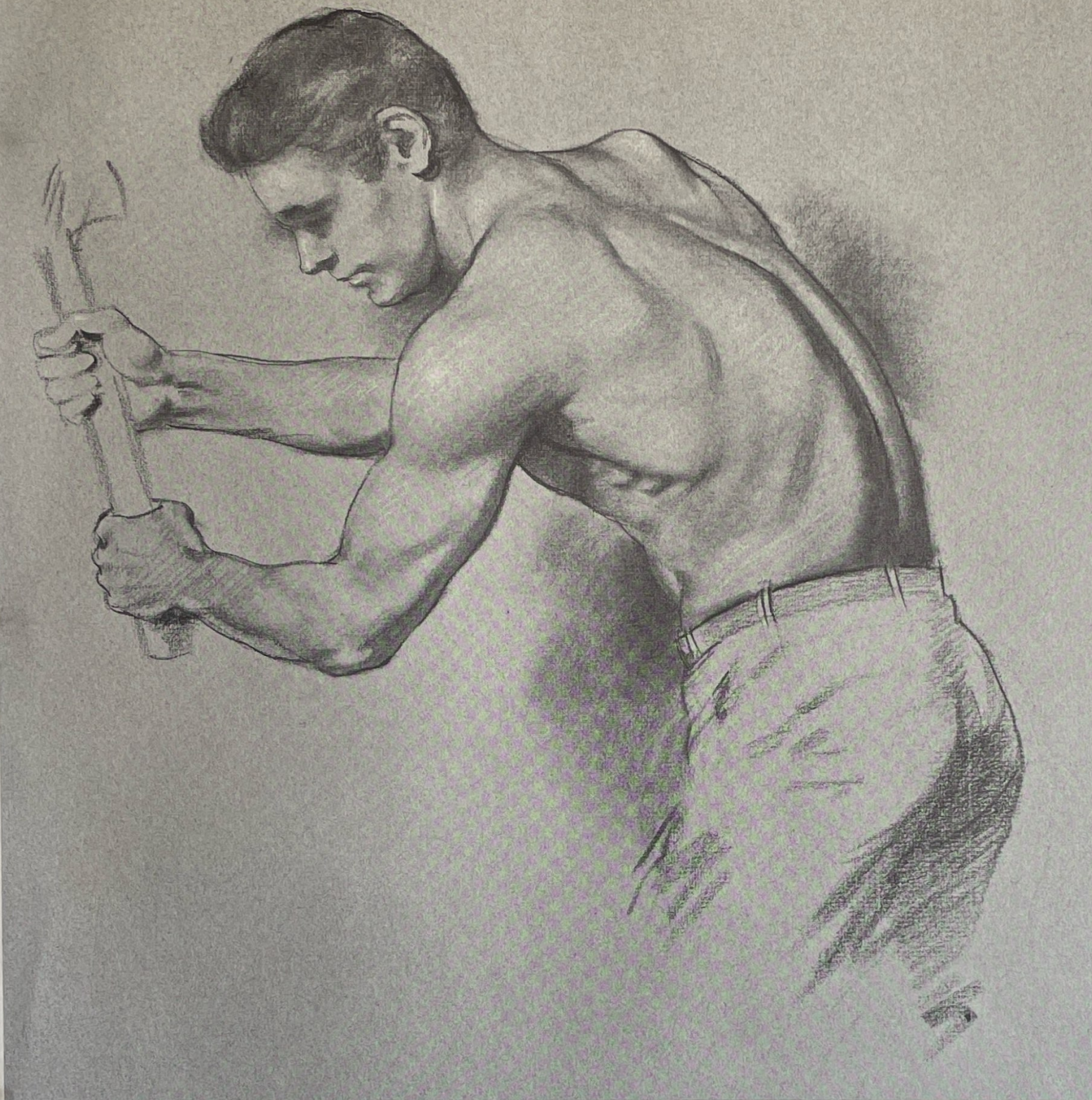


Figure Drawing by Richard Lack.

The finished drawing is an interesting combination of stump blending and direct rendering. While the artist used a paper stump for the subtle shading on the skin, he used a direct method for the clothing because the bolder treatment resembles the texture of fabric. The two techniques give life and vitality to the drawing. And the artist has tied these two rendering methods together by using a stump blended background for both.



Courtesy of Dayton's, Minneapolis.



Illustration by John Berkey.

Charcoal For Advertising and Illustration

Charcoal is especially popular for fashion illustrations. It's easy to create a loose modern quality with charcoal, and the bold lines and textures are appropriate for indicating fabric. Notice how the artist used charcoal on textured paper to produce this spontaneous and modern advertisement. The artist used charcoal pencil for the fine lines in the details.

This interesting charcoal illustration incorporates transparent wash. First the artist rendered the drawing in varied tones of transparent wash, then he used charcoal for outlining and texture interest. This drawing was done on regular surface illustration board.

Checking Up on Yourself

Charcoal drawing is an important part of your development as a well-rounded artist. For this reason we have selected some of the important points you should remember. This will give you a chance to see how well you covered the lesson.

Do You Remember That:

1. Charcoal sticks and pencils come in hard, medium and soft grades.
2. Some charcoal is made chemically.
3. Charcoal is useful for fast sketches.
4. Charcoal has a wide value range.
5. Shading can be made easier and smoother with a paper stump.
6. Charcoal drawing is often used in combination with other mediums.
7. Charcoal drawing is used in commercial art as well as in the fine arts.
8. Charcoal work is easy to correct if you use a kneaded eraser.
9. Charcoal is inexpensive.
10. The chamois or a piece of cloth can be used to lighten drawings.

Did You:

1. Try blending with a paper stump?
2. Try using white chalk for highlights on gray and colored paper?
3. Experiment with the value range you can create with charcoal?
4. Do all of the practice work?
5. Find any charcoal drawings in magazines and newspapers?

CHARCOAL DRAWING LESSON

We have given you two outlines for your "Charcoal Drawing Lesson Assignment". Use one of the outlines for practice, then complete the second and send it to the School.

When you draw the girl's head, you will have a chance to use stump blending, direct method rendering and white chalk.

In this stage, the artist began to use the paper stump. By rubbing the areas of the face and hair, he created realistic softness. Stump blending is especially popular for portrait studies.



After you complete your charcoal study, be sure to use fixatif so your drawing will not smear. It's a good idea to tape a protective sheet of tracing paper over your drawing before you put it in the envelope and send it to the School. Remember to do all of the practice work before you begin your lesson assignment. Send your drawing and the Charcoal Test to the School for comments and grading.

We will grade your art work on the basis of how well you use direct and stump blending, how much your drawing looks like the artist's rendering, and how neat your work is.

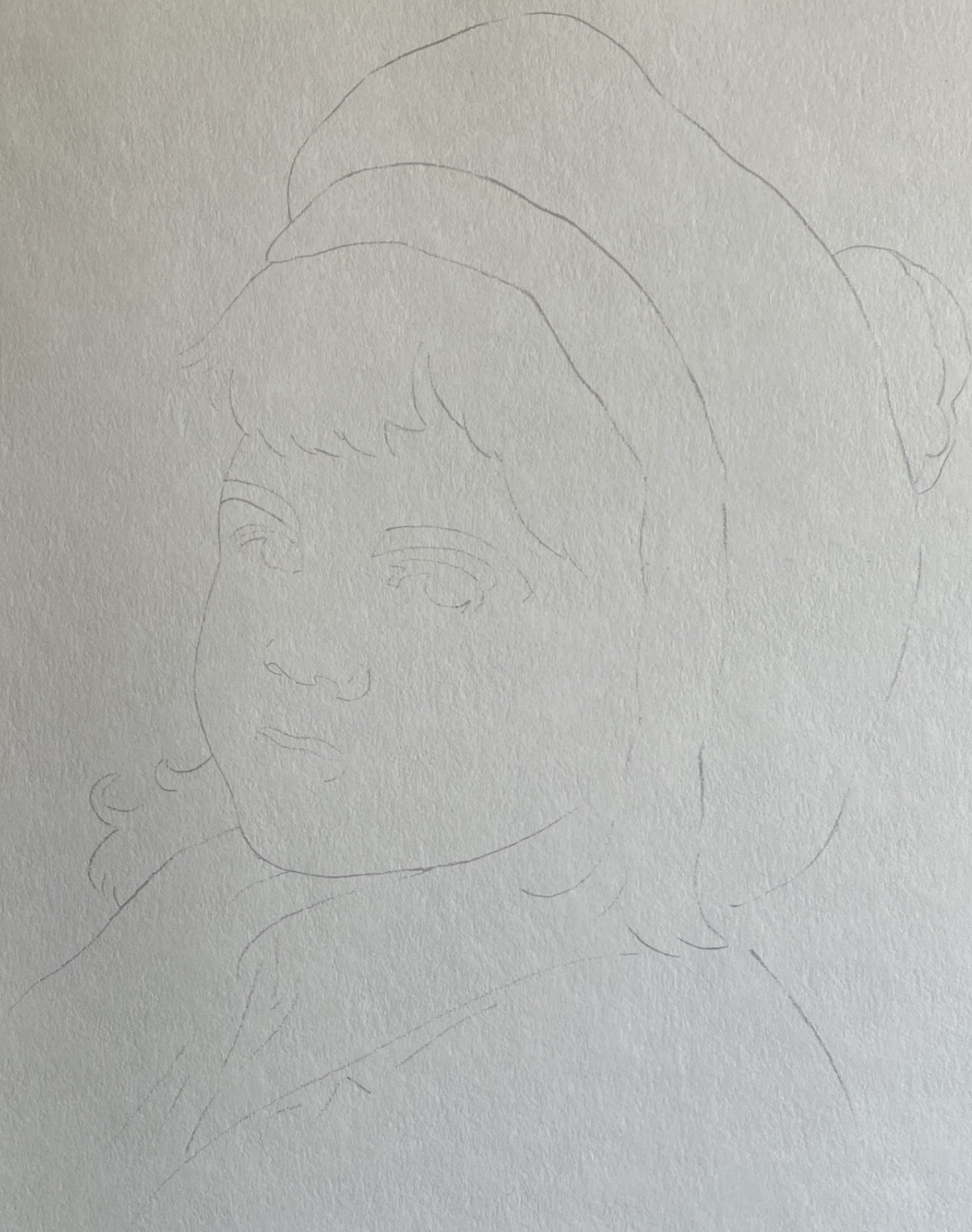


This drawing was developed from an outline just like the one on the Charcoal Assignment page. First the artist lightly "roughed in" the shading and major dark areas (hair, features). He kept the shading light in case he needed to make some changes. Notice that the artist has not concentrated on just one part of the drawing, but rather has developed the drawing equally.

The completed drawing incorporates both stump shading and the direct method. The artist intensified the dark areas, added white chalk for highlights, and kept the drawing soft and realistic by using a paper stump.

Portrait by Richard Lack, of his daughter.





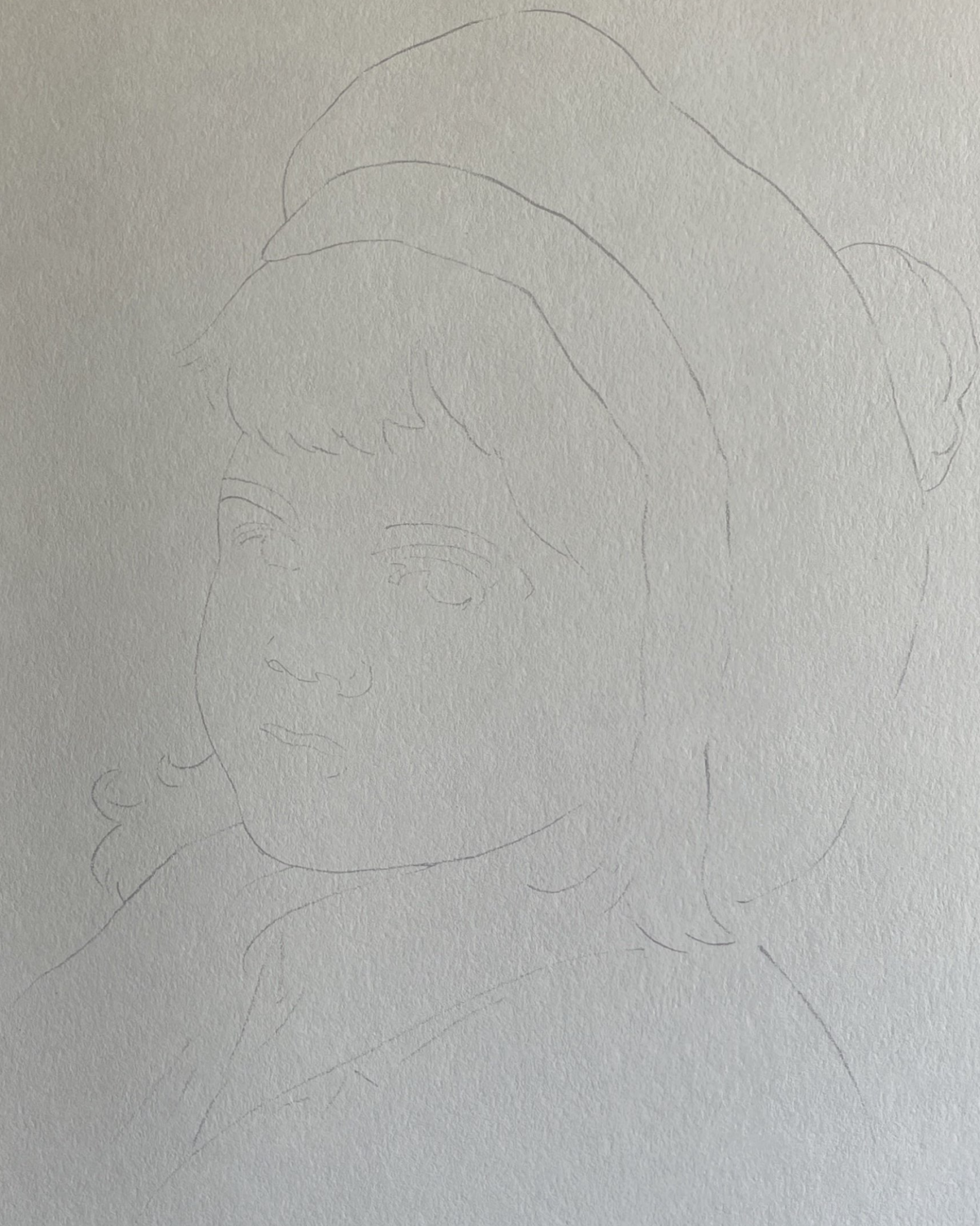
CHARCOAL DRAWING LESSON ASSIGNMENT

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Name _____

Street No. _____

City _____ State _____



CHARCOAL DRAWING LESSON ASSIGNMENT

Student No. _____ Date _____

Name _____

Street No. _____

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CHARCOAL DRAWING TEST

Directions: Study each statement before you decide if it is True or False. If you think the statement is correct or True, mark an X in the box under "T". If you think the statement is wrong or False, put an X in the box under the "F".

Complete the test and send it to the School with your Charcoal Drawing Assignment.

True-False Questions

- | T | F | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | 1. Charcoal drawings are useful for sketches, but charcoal is never used for finished drawings. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 2. One of the things that makes charcoal popular is its value range (range of lights and darks). |
| ☐ | ☐ | 3. Charcoal drawing is similar to pencil drawing. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 4. Charcoal drawings always have an unfinished look because it is impossible to shade them. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 5. There is only one type of paper you can do charcoal drawings on. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 6. Charcoal drawings are easy to correct. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 7. Charcoal can be used for accents and texture on both transparent and opaque wash drawings. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 8. The artist likes charcoal for portrait work because when it is rubbed or blended it has a soft, smooth look that resembles skin. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 9. The paper stump is especially helpful for subtle blending. |
| ☐ | ☐ | 10. Charcoal pencils are often used for details and fine line work. |

Student No. _____ Date _____

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City _____ State _____